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PORUGAL

Communist influence in Portugal was dealt another blow yesterday when the government nationalized radio and television stations.

An official announcement said the stations would be combined into a government-regulated nationwide broadcasting service that would no longer be subject to political or economic pressure. Fulfilling a promise made by Prime Minister Azevedo in September, programming will be restructured to guarantee "ideological pluralism." Foreign-owned stations and the Catholic Church's Radio Renascenca were not nationalized.

The nationalization move had been expected since government forces occupied the stations during last week's abortive coup attempt. Although the government has not up to now directly implicated the Communists in the attempt, media under their control have been accused not only of contributing to the general atmosphere that produced the uprising but also of urging support of the rebellion once it was under way.

Last week while the Lisbon area was still under martial law, the Communists' grip on the national press was loosened when administrative and editorial boards of eight major newspapers were summarily dismissed. Top officials in the government news agency, which served as a Communist propaganda vehicle, have also been replaced.

With its once-powerful influence on the media now greatly diminished, the Communist Party's right to a place in the government is being challenged. Although Major Ernesto Melo Antunes, head of the dominant group in the military, has said the Communists still have an "essential role" to play, they have come in for severe criticism from the democratic parties, who hold them accountable for last week's uprising.

The center-left Popular Democrats are demanding the immediate dismissal of all Communists from the government, while the Socialists want the Communists to repudiate the rebellion and swear loyalty to the government in exchange for their continued participation in the cabinet.

Both the Antunes faction and the Socialists probably would like the Communists to remain in the government to help ensure labor peace until a measure of stability is restored to the economy. Continued friction between the Popular Democrats and the Communists, however, may force the military to drop the two parties from the government and rule with the Socialists until an election is held next spring.

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CUBA-ANGOLA

A Cuban officer captured by the National Union for Total Independence of Angola has provided additional details on his country's support of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

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[redacted] said the Cubans had set up and operated two camps in Benguela—no longer in the hands of the Popular Movement—where Angolans were given a 20-day course in basic infantry training. [redacted] claimed he had not seen any Soviets in Angola.

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The total number of Cubans supporting the Soviet-backed Popular Movement is now estimated to be between 3,500 and 4,000. [redacted]

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ECUADOR

President Rodriguez reportedly will announce plans for returning Ecuador to civilian rule in a speech on Saturday.

His decision may have been spurred by the steady deterioration in his position, compounded recently by his harsh attacks on political leaders, his imposition of press censorship, and his threat to use force to ensure the institutionalization of his government.

Political leaders will probably accept the President's procedures for a return to civilian government if he sets a firm date, but problems may arise between military officers who favor a return to civilian rule and those who do not. Rodriguez was the target of a military coup attempt in September, and his support among his colleagues in the armed forces remains weak. [redacted]

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LEBANON

The Lebanese government has reacted sharply to the Israeli air strikes on several fedayeen camps on Tuesday. Following an emergency cabinet session yesterday, Prime Minister Karami called for a special session of the UN Security Council to debate the raids, a departure from Lebanon's practice of issuing written complaints against Tel Aviv.

Egypt also has reacted strongly to the raids, terming them a violation "in spirit" of Israel's disengagement agreements with Syria and Egypt. Cairo called for participation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in a Security Council debate, further complicating the bombing issue.

The Egyptians are undoubtedly anxious to prove to the other Arabs that they are as concerned for Palestinian interests as are the Syrians. It was at Syria's urging that the Council decided on Sunday to invite the PLO to the Middle East debate next month. Egypt may believe that, since the precedent has now been set, its own effort to include the PLO in a debate on the raid will be more easily approved and will not seriously harm its relations with the US.

The Israeli attacks were the heaviest in some months and were carried out farther north than the Israelis have bombed in nearly three years. Two camps near Tripoli in the north and a camp near Mount Hermon in southeastern Lebanon were hit. According to US officials in Beirut, many of the 100 feared dead are believed to have been civilian noncombatants.

The raids have added new uncertainty to the internal political and security situation in Lebanon as attention shifts to the Israeli "challenge." Reaction to the attacks will almost certainly complicate Prime Minister Karami's efforts to form a new government by the end of the week. It will also distract the Lebanese army and Palestinian security units from their recent and relatively successful attempts to bring violators of the cease-fire under control.

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BANGLADESH

Communal tensions in Bangladesh and strained relations with India may be further worsened by a radical Bengalee leader's call this week for a pro-Muslim, anti-Indian rally on December 7. Government officials in Dacca, fearful of possible Indian intervention in Bangladesh, presumably will take steps to block the rally, or at least will try to keep it from getting out of hand and endangering the Hindu minority.

The rally, called by opposition leader Maulana Bhashani, has been heralded by inflammatory leaflets that condemn India and urge Islamic unity. The leaflets' religious overtones will probably increase apprehensions among Bangladesh's Hindus, who have been especially uneasy since the wounding last week of the Indian high commissioner in Dacca by members of a Bengalee opposition group.

Dacca probably will continue efforts to ease Hindu concerns. It recently increased police protection for the Hindus and tightened security in Dacca in reaction to rumors that the group that wounded the Indian high commissioner plans another incident.

The US embassy in Dacca reports that the anti-Indian statements in the leaflets announcing the rally have struck a responsive chord among Bengalees. The leaflets are sure to upset officials in New Delhi. India has already protested the desecration last week of a Hindu temple in Dacca, and officials in New Delhi charge that there have been incidents at other temples in Bangladesh.

Dacca can be expected to continue its attempts to reassure India. The visit of a high-level Bengalee delegation to New Delhi still appears temporarily stalled, but Indian and Bengalee border commanders are meeting this week in Calcutta. Bengalee leaders and newspapers have recently been avoiding statements that could antagonize India.

India has repeatedly warned that a mass exodus of Hindus into India would lead to military intervention. So far, there is no sign of a large-scale Hindu flight, but New Delhi is charging that more Hindus than usual have recently been seeking visas to migrate to India. [redacted]

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LAOS

The 19-month-old Lao coalition has been formally dissolved, and Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and King Savang Vatthana have been forced to relinquish their positions.

The announcement came following the completion of a two-day conference convened by the Central Committee of the Communist National Patriotic Front in Vientiane. The conference resulted in a unanimous agreement to accept the King's abdication and abolish the monarchy and to dissolve the coalition and the Joint National Political Council. A resolution calling for the immediate establishment of a new government to be known as the People's Democratic Republic of Laos was also passed at the conference.

This morning a Communist spokesman in Vientiane announced that Prince Souphanouvong will be President of the new government. His half-brother, Prince Souvanna Phouma, was named an "adviser" to the government and King Savang was made "supreme adviser" to the President.

Souphanouvong's post, as well as the advisory positions of King Savang and Prince Souvanna, almost certainly will be ceremonial, since the secretary general of the Laotian Communist Party, Kaysone Phomvihan, has taken the position of prime minister. In addition, the party's deputy chief has been made deputy prime minister and all the ministers announced are senior party officials.

The Communists' decision to establish a new government comes somewhat ahead of their previously stated timetable. They have been in effective control of the country for some time and are apparently now prepared to begin moving more quickly toward creating a totally communist state.

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ICELAND-NATO

Prime Minister Hallgrimsson has assured the US ambassador to Iceland that Foreign Minister Agustsson will attend the NATO ministerial meeting in Brussels next week despite the fisheries dispute with Britain.

Hallgrimsson said there was little sentiment within the cabinet to withdraw from NATO or to dismantle the US-manned Keflavik base. He attributed the cabinet's disinclination to take such rash action to a realistic assessment of world conditions and to Reykjavik's desire to resolve the fishing dispute through negotiations.

Agustsson had intimated earlier that he would not attend the NATO meeting and suggested that Iceland's permanent delegation might be withdrawn. He also said Iceland would withdraw from the alliance and dismantle the Keflavik base if the UK did not remove its frigates from Iceland's disputed waters.

The foreign minister's strong anti-NATO statements were designed to focus attention on the dispute with the UK and to induce NATO, and especially the US, to persuade the UK to be more forthcoming. Reykjavik issued similar threats during an outbreak of the "cod war" in 1972-73 but did not follow through on them.

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AUSTRALIA

Public opinion polls confirm a trend in favor of the Liberal-Country coalition as the campaign for the national election on December 13 enters the final stretch. If the trend continues, the Liberal-Country coalition could win a comfortable parliamentary majority.

Constitutional questions raised by the Liberal-Country coalition's delay of appropriations and the governor general's subsequent dismissal of the Labor government have been eclipsed by the economy as the primary issue. Labor leader Whitlam's response to criticism of his economic policies has been ineffective. Some of Whitlam's backers claim, however, that he is withholding an all-out attack until the final week of the campaign. His lackluster performance in the past week has permitted the Liberal-Country coalition to build its lead in the opinion polls.

Liberal leader Fraser, heading an effective, well-financed campaign, shows complete confidence. Limiting himself to vague promises to various interest groups, he seems to be relying mostly on the voters' disenchantment with the Labor Party.

Fraser's pledge to introduce legislation requiring a secret ballot in union elections—a step designed to weaken the hold of communist union leaders—has probably hit a responsive chord with the public. He is taking a conciliatory stance toward trade union leader Robert Hawke, who is also president of the Labor Party, and he is trying to dissociate Hawke from Whitlam's policies. Fraser hopes this tactic will calm popular concern that a Liberal-Country victory would result in serious labor strife and at the same time elicit the cooperation his government would need from Hawke and other responsible union leaders.

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